Vagrants and Vagrancy in England, 1598–1664

By PAUL A. SLACK

I

"THE greatest part" of rogues, wrote Richard Younge, in 1654, "are an uncircumcised generation, unbaptized, out of the Church, and so consequently without God in the world".[1] He was echoing a condemnation which had risen in volume and violence over the previous century. Social commentators of all kinds were unanimous, from the royal physicians concerned about the danger to public health and Bacon appalled at this "seed of peril and tumult in a state" to magistrates and ministers like Lambarde and Perkins who agreed that the laws against vagrants were "grounded upon the laws of God and nature itself".[2] Vagabonds became the scapegoats for all social problems. They were carriers of rumour, sedition, and disease, and they infected others with their "licentious liberty".[3] The threat posed by their needless idleness and reckless mobility seemed immediate and overwhelming. In spite of the continuing interest in poverty and the growing amount of work on migration in this period, however, historians have seldom been able to penetrate the haze of rhetorical abuse to see the vagabond as he was, to define his status, or assess the significance of his mobility.

A recent survey of migrants in one English county has suggested that mobility among the lower strata of society was both long-distance and frequent,[4] and the literary reactions to vagrancy would support this hypothesis.[5] But sources which throw light on vagabonds themselves are difficult to find. There are, for example, no hospital records of the kind so helpful to French historians. Yet according to the vagrancy statute of 1597 each parish should have kept its own register of vagrants whipped and returned to their place of birth or residence.[6] It is clear that these were compiled and referred to in the early seventeenth century, but few of them remain.[7] Information would be most valuable for large urban communities where vagrants were common. Here vagrants' passports were sometimes

[1] Richard Younge, *The Poores Advocate* (1654), ch. XIV, p. 10.

[2] P.R.O. SP 16/533/17, fo. 39*r*; J. Spedding, ed. *Letters and Life of Francis Bacon* (1861–74), IV, 252; C. Read, ed. *William Lambarde and Local Government* (Ithaca, 1962), p. 173; C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964), p. 259.

[3] *Orders and Directions* (1630), sig. G4*v*. Cf. *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Salisbury (Cecil) MSS*, XXII, 297; P.R.O. SP 16/293/44; B. H. Cunnington, ed. *Records of the County of Wilts.* (Devizes, 1932), pp. 10–11.

[4] P. Clark, 'The Migrant in Kentish Towns, 1580–1640', in P. Clark and P. Slack, eds. *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700* (1972), pp. 117–63. A suggestive summary of recent work is J. Patten, *Rural-Urban Migration in Pre-Industrial England* (Oxford University School of Geography, Research Papers 6, 1973).

[5] Summarized in F. Aydelotte, *Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds* (Oxford, 1913) and F. W. Chandler, *The Literature of Roguery* (Boston, 1907).

[6] *Statutes of the Realm*, 39 Eliz. c. 4, clause III.

[7] There are references to parochial lists in P.R.O. SP 16/210/44, 250/47, 239/129, 130, 349/73, 388/7 (XXXVIII). Short surviving lists are described in E. Melling, ed. *Kentish Sources: The Poor* (Maidstone, 1964), pp. 18–19; C. D. Stooks, *A History of Crondall and Yateley, Hants* (Winchester, 1905), pp. 29–30.

entered haphazardly in order books or council minutes along with other business.[1] But in two towns at least separate lists of passports were kept for long periods in the seventeenth century and these still survive.

The first and most thorough register was compiled in Salisbury between 1598 and 1638. The record lists 557 passports containing the names of 651 vagrants. All were described as wandering and—unless pregnant, disabled, or under the statutory age of seven—were whipped; and all were ordered to be passed from constable to constable back to their birthplace or parish of residence. The second register which survives for the town of Colchester records the similar treatment of 237 vagrants in a list of all strangers expelled from the town between 1630 and 1664.[2] The evidence from these two towns of eastern and southern England may be compared with information from other parts of the country in the returns made by justices of the peace to the Privy Council in the 1630's. These certificates provide information about 132 vagrants found in Hertfordshire,[3] 614 in the counties of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey,[4] 296 in Devon and Cornwall,[5] and 916 vagrants discovered in Lancashire and Westmorland.[6] Finally, the printed minutes of the Norwich Court of Mayoralty record the punishment of 161 vagrants expelled from the town between 1630 and 1635.[7] These samples permit some comparison with the more detailed continuous registers of Salisbury and Colchester, and, together recording some 3,000 individuals, they suggest general conclusions about the problem of vagrancy and the characteristics of vagrants in the early seventeenth century.

The limitations inherent in the records are, however, evident. The amount of information they provide is uneven, only names and places of origins being regularly recorded. Even the Colchester and Salisbury series are difficult to interpret, since it is never clear how far variations in the numbers of vagabonds punished from year to year reflect changing levels of enforcement or a change in the actual volume of vagrancy. Certainly those apprehended were only the tip of the iceberg and can tell us little about the quantitative as distinct from the qualitative features of the vagrant phenomenon. The most serious difficulty, however, concerns the reliability and significance of the evidence of vagrant origins provided by these records. The parish to which a vagrant was returned might be either his birthplace or the parish where he last resided for at least a year. But in either case the record does not tell us how long or where the vagrant had been wandering since he left the parish to which he was returned. This is a vital quali-

[1] E.g. Southampton Borough Records, Book of Instruments, 1597–1689, fo. 115 and *passim*; J. M. Guilding, ed. *Reading Records: Diary of the Corporation* (1892–6), II, 262–3.

[2] Salisbury Corporation Archives (hereafter S.C.A.), Poor Accounts Z225, fos. 12–45; Colchester Borough Records (hereafter C.B.R.), Shelf I, Sessions of the Peace Book II, 1630–64. I am indebted to the Town Clerks of Salisbury and Colchester for permission to quote from the documents in their care.

[3] P.R.O. SP 16/319/85, 344/30, 347/67, 418/21.

[4] P.R.O. SP 16/220/33, 314/77, 319/64, 328/7, 61, 68, 347/68, 70, 363/100, 115, 122, 364/119, 393/76, 85, 99, 417/25, 424/112, 425/85, 426/87.

[5] P.R.O. SP 16/265/34, 93, 275/15, 289/58, 364/28, 395/21, 397/99.

[6] P.R.O. SP 16/273/23, 351/31, 364/122, 123, 366/90, 382/9, 81, 383/56, 388/7, 395/105, 106, 112, 397/36.

[7] W. L. Sachse, ed. *Minutes of the Norwich Court of Mayoralty, 1630–1* (Norfolk Record Society, XV, 1942); idem, ed. *Minutes of the Norwich Court of Mayoralty, 1632–5* (Norfolk Rec. Soc. XXXVI, 1967). Only those strangers specifically described as vagrants or punished before being expelled from the town are included in this sample.

fication to be made in any calculation of the distances which vagrants moved. Again, the authorities were dependent on the vagrant's own testimony for evidence of his place of origin. If he wished to visit London he need only say that he was born there. A Salisbury vagabond, for example, who alleged that he lived in Colchester, later confessed "that he dwelleth not in Colchester but hath friends there dwelling and abiding and desireth to travel thither".[1] Nevertheless, the variety of places given, many of them tiny obscure hamlets, and the detail of parishes or even streets which were often added in the case of large towns, suggest some truthfulness on the part of many vagrants; and where it has proved possible to check the vagrant's allegations with parish registers, birth- or dwelling-places have been confirmed for a striking proportion of cases, granted that we are looking for individuals in the social category most likely to escape parochial registration.[2]

Like other evidence bearing on those who were on the very margins of society, or, as contemporaries thought, completely outside it, the information provided by vagrancy passports can never be taken entirely at its face value. But in the absence of other sources it cannot be ignored, and it may be used to provide significant, if tentative, conclusions. In particular it suggests that vagrants were a recognizable and limited social group, and it illuminates the patterns of their mobility and possibly those of lower-class migrants in general.

II

The first problem for the historian, as for contemporaries, is to know who the vagrant actually was, to define his status. For vagrant and vagabond were emotive, elastic terms. Were vagrants, as statutory definitions often suggest, the useful or picturesque wandering pedlars and minstrels whom M.P.s on occasion wished to protect,[3] or those able-bodied professional beggars of the criminal underworld painted so definitively by Harman and his successors? Or were they simply unskilled migrant labourers and paupers, distinguishable on the one hand from the non-migrant poor and on the other from migrants of higher social status moving in search of work? The statute of 1597 tried to protect the two latter groups by insisting on wandering or "loitering" and the absence of any visible "living . . . to maintain themselves" in vagrants.[4] But it seems from the resolutions of the assize judges in 1629 and 1633 that they were not in practice always immune: it was necessary to insist that justices were not to "meddle either with the removing or settling of any poor, but only of rogues", and to condemn "illegal

[1] S.C.A. Z225, 6 Aug. 1628. He was nevertheless sent to Colchester.—Cf. J. W. Horrocks, ed. *Assembly Books of Southampton* (Southampton Rec. Soc. 1917–25), II, 55; Wiltshire Record Office (hereafter W.R.O.), Quarter Sessions Minute Book 1610–16, pp. 25–6.

[2] It has been possible to check the alleged place of origin of 16 Salisbury vagrants; four have been confirmed and a further five are probable if mistakes in Christian names are assumed: e.g. William Gill returned to Leeds in 1634 was baptized in Leeds in 1613.—G. D. Lumb, ed. *The Registers of the Parish Church of Leeds, 1612–39* (Thorseby Soc. III, 1895), p. 11; Edmund Vye returned to Colyton in 1598 may be the Edward Vye baptized there in 1549.—A. J. P. Skinner, ed. *The Register of Colyton, 1538–1837* (Devon and Cornwall Rec. Soc. 1928). p. 11.

[3] S. D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments of Elizabeth* (1682), p. 220; *Hist. MSS Com. House of Lords MSS*, new ser. XI, 8.

[4] 39 Eliz. c. 4, clause II. The Vagrancy Act of 1657 weakened the strength of this latter qualification but it seems not to have affected the sort of vagrants apprehended in Colchester.—C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum* (1911), II, 1098–9.

unsettling . . . for none must be enforced to turn vagrant".[1] Consequently it has sometimes been implied that the vagrancy laws, like the ideological preconceptions and social prejudices which lay behind them, were employed against lower-class mobility of all kinds or against the able-bodied poor as a whole.[2]

It is certainly true that the categories of potential vagrant enumerated above were by no means distinct. Fortune-telling and theft were alternative sources of income for any poor migrant whose hope of finding regular employment in the economic conditions of the early seventeenth century was slim. The native poor of a parish once pushed out by parish authorities or pulled by a husband or parent would find return virtually impossible. Similarly, the hitherto respectable tradesman, seeking better opportunities in another town, might be expelled without punishment as a stranger or inmate under the strict (if usually informal and local) settlement regulations of the period, and at his next port-of-call find himself treated as a vagrant. Servants at the end of their term or those dismissed by their masters ran similar risks.[3]

On occasion the records allow us to glimpse this descent of the social scale, to follow the process which ended in vagrancy. Thomas Coxe, his wife, and two children had an apprentice with them when they were whipped and sent from Salisbury to Gaddesden, Hertfordshire, in March 1624. Eleven months later the family was taken in Salisbury again, but the apprentice and one of the children had disappeared.[4] This complete family was being fragmented. The death or flight of a parent or husband left women liable to "become a vagrant" because they were "harbourless". In the six months after her father left Essex, Susan Tomalin "begged about the Marshes", while Agnes Symons "wandered up and down in several shires begging" for two years after the death of her father in Somerset.[5] Pretexts might be found to force the native poor of a town on to the road. Stephen Poole of Salisbury deserted his sick wife and went to Romsey "because the parish would not give more for his wife's maintenance"; she was sent after him with a passport. After the inhabitants of a Norfolk village put Denys Amys in a Norwich hospital he was treated as a vagrant by the city authorities.[6] When parishes were quicker to expel the poor than to welcome their return, the chances of the drummer boy from Devizes found with a passport saying he was "minded to travel until he be settled" were minimal.[7] Once the first step

[1] M. Dalton, *The Countrey Justice* (1682 edn), pp. 158, 166. For examples of doubts on this point see P.R.O. Asz 24/20, fos. 29*v*, 72*v*; J. Lister, ed. *West Riding Sessions Rolls* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, III, 1888), pp. 85–6; R. H. Tawney and E. Power, eds. *Tudor Economic Documents* (1924), II, 363.

[2] M. G. Davies, *The Enforcement of English Apprenticeship, 1563–1642* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 7; M. James, *Social Problems and Policy during the Puritan Revolution* (1930), p. 286. Cf. S. and B. Webb, *The Old Poor Law* (1927), pp. 319–20.

[3] Cf. P. Styles, 'The Evolution of the Law of Settlement', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, IX, (1963), 38–9, 44–5; T. G. Barnes, ed. *Somerset Assize Orders* (Somerset Rec. Soc. LXV, 1959), pp. 6–7, 29 and n.

[4] For other cases of vagrants with servants see C.B.R. Sessions Book II, March 1648; P.R.O. SP 16/314/77; and for examples of vagrants claiming to be gentlemen, P.R.O. SP 12/81/22; C.B.R. Sessions Book II, Aug. 1642; S.C.A. Z225, 27 Aug. 1599; *Hist. MSS Com. Various*, I, 92.

[5] P.R.O. Asz 24/20, fo. 137*r*; C.B.R. Sessions Book II, 7 March 1635; S.C.A. Z225, 17 March 1617.

[6] S.C.A. Poor Accounts S162, fos. 191*v*, 194*r*; Sachse, ed. *Minutes, 1632–5*, pp. 32, 59–60. Cf. E. Lipson, *Economic History of England* (1934), III, 460; J. Lister, ed. *West Riding Sessions Records II* (Yorks. Arch. Soc. Rec. Ser. LIV, 1915), p. 175.

[7] W.R.O. Sessions File, Mich. 1604, docs. 147, 152.

had been taken, whether voluntarily or not, the road to vagrancy was an easy and precipitous one.

Most of the vagrants found in these records, however, seem to have been far from any past reality or present hope of respectability. Humphrey Reade and his wife, taken in Salisbury in 1610, had no "certain place of dwelling and have wandered many years". Anne Standley had been wandering for a year and "hath received punishment three times before this time". Others had been following the progress of the court or moving from fair to fair for months.[1] It is not surprising, therefore, that a few had turned to the traditional occupations of the wayfaring life as popular entertainers. Among the Salisbury vagrants were a fortune-teller, a minstrel, a morris-dancer, and two conjurors.[2] Others fit closely the categories of professional beggar described by Harman. There were "counterfeit Bedlams" and a counterfeit cripple in Hertfordshire.[3] One of the Salisbury vagrants was a "Dummerer", pretending "he hath no tongue". Some used the role of a guide for cripples as a pretext for begging and migration, like the married couple who had walked with the husband's lame brother all the way from Northumberland. One Amazon manipulated sickness as a threat rather than an object of pity, terrifying Salisbury citizens by running into their houses "affirming herself to have the plague". The settlement regulations of the period presented opportunities of a more sophisticated kind. There was a wholesale trade in counterfeit passports of the sort prescribed by the Statute of Artificers for those travelling in search of work.[4] One Salisbury vagrant had a certificate made "by a stranger under a hedge"; another paid 3s. for one in London, while the price in Dorset was 2s. Forged certificates claiming losses by fire[5] or allowing travel as maimed soldiers were even more useful. Two rogues claiming to have been wounded in Ostend were given money by a string of county treasurers for maimed soldiers in 1602, before they admitted that their passports were forged by a man in Shoreditch.[6]

Yet this sort of information is provided in only a small proportion of cases. The picturesque or professional rogue appears to have been the exception not the rule. Men and women with stated occupations were rather less rare, though again in a small minority. Of the 651 Salisbury vagrants, 70 were accredited with trades. There was a joiner, a shoemaker, a wiredrawer, and two weavers. But a third of these were petty chapmen or pedlars, reflecting at this social level the contemporary expansion in the society of wayfaring traders.[7] One sold ballads, another rapiers and daggers, and a third was found "selling of small books seeming to be distracted". Other pedlars doubled as receivers of stolen goods, like Margaret Legg alias Jackson alias Smith, found in possession of a stolen cloak, who claimed

[1] S.C.A. Z225, 15 Aug. 1609, 8 Aug. 1618, 12 Sept. 1601; W.R.O. Sessions Roll, Mich. 1604, doc. 151.

[2] Vagrants practising these occupations were occasionally called "gypsies" but very few genuine gypsies have been discovered.—P.R.O. SP 16/281/83; *Hist. MSS Com. Various*, I, 129; Cunnington, ed. op. cit. p. 26.

[3] P.R.O. SP 16/385/43, 329/56. Cf. A. V. Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (1930), pp. 86, 91.

[4] Tawney and Power, eds. op. cit. I, 341. One forger carefully kept a list of the names of J.P.s in various counties.—Cunnington, ed. op. cit. p. 52.

[5] Cf. W.R.O. Sessions Roll, Hilary 1610, doc. 125; B. H. Cunnington, *Some Annals of the Borough of Devizes, 1555–1791* (Devizes, 1925), pt II, p. 41; S.C.A. Z225, 31 March 1618.

[6] S.C.A. Q136b, deposition of 44 Eliz.

[7] Cf. A. Everitt, *Change in the Provinces: The Seventeenth Century* (Leicester University, Department of English Local History, Occasional Papers, 2nd ser. I, 1969), pp. 38–43.

that a beating from her husband had prevented her practising her trade.[1] Apart from professional rogues and wandering pedlars, there were two other noticeable sub-groups among the vagrants listed. The first were allegedly runaway apprentices and servants, some of them maltreated by their masters, others suspiciously pregnant.[2] They numbered eighteen of the Salisbury vagrants and four of those taken in Colchester. The second distinct group were the Irish. Nineteen of them were punished as vagrants in Salisbury, 12 between 1629 and 1633 when Irish famine pushed hundreds of emigrants into the western counties.[3] They were more conspicuous than their numbers suggest, since they often moved in bands of a dozen or more. In Colchester in October 1631 one Irishman, five women, and four children were apprehended together; in the Colyton division of Devon a few years later 15 Irish adults and 14 children were taken in a band.[4] Odd travelling Irishmen might sometimes be supported from parish doles,[5] but these gangs were an immediate problem for local constables and the probable foundation of Irish scares in the next decade.[6]

The Irish bands, like the other groups already mentioned, were, however, exceptional. English vagrants travelled in ones and twos. They might have their familiar haunts in a local ale-house, an isolated barn, or a lodging-house like that of John Matthew, a Salisbury hosier,[7] but whether they relied on petty crime or persuasive begging for their livelihood, or were genuinely seeking work, their chances of success depended on their relative solitude.[8] They also often depended on a certain anonymity, hence the frequency of aliases in these records. As a result the vagrant's physical appearance was often his most notable characteristic, as with Elizabeth Taylor, a Lancashire woman "having black hair, a green waistcoat, a red petticoat and tall of stature, being great with child".[9] But vagrants are usually described in the record merely by a name and a place of origin, and the majority of them appear as isolated individuals about whom only the simplest and broadest generalizations are possible.

Like migrants in other societies, English vagrants appear to have been normally young adults, although ages are commonly given only in three records.[10]

[1] S.C.A. Q136b, exam. of 11 Jan. 1610.

[2] Cf. S.C.A. Z225, 2 July 1608; Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, Norfolk Sessions Roll, 1627–8, petition of Nicholas Smith; *Hist. MSS Com. Various*, I, 101.

[3] C. J. Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy* (1887), p. 148; A. H. A. Hamilton, *Quarter Sessions from Queen Elizabeth to Queen Anne* (1878), p. 105; T. G. Barnes, *Somerset, 1625–40* (1961), p. 182; P.R.O. SP 16/181/123.

[4] P.R.O. SP 16/265/34. Cf. SP 16/176/55, 234/57, 289/43; W.R.O. Sessions File, Trinity 1629, doc. 112.

[5] E.g. Exeter City Muniments, St Kerrian's Churchwardens' Accounts, 1602–1700, 1643–4 account; Essex Record Office (hereafter E.R.O.), D/P 128/5/1, fo. 64*r*; H. J. F. Swayne, *Churchwardens' Accounts of S. Edmund and S. Thomas Sarum* (Salisbury, 1896), pp. 176, 312.

[6] Cf. P.R.O. SP 16/141/75; R. Clifton, 'The Popular Fear of Catholics during the English Revolution', *Past and Present*, LII (1971), 49–52.

[7] S.C.A. Q136b, 14 Dec. 1601; Cunnington, ed. *Records of Wilts.* pp. 38–9; P.R.O. Asz 24/20, fo. 76*r*.

[8] Only two large bands of English vagrants, largely children, have been found.—P.R.O. SP 16/314/77, 363/100; W.R.O. Sessions File, Easter 1632, doc. 170. Cf. Hext's comments in Tawney and Power, eds. op. cit. II, 345.

[9] P.R.O. SP 16/388/7(iii).

[10] Cf. J. P. Poussu, 'Les Mouvements Migratoires en France et à partir de la France de la fin du XVe siècle au debut du XIXe siècle', *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1970), 15; J. A. Jackson, ed. *Migration* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 63; T. H. Hollingsworth, *Migration* (Edinburgh, 1970), p. 97. I am grateful to Dr A. L. Beier for information from the list of the Hampshire village of Crondall, which is still in the parish church.

Table 1. *The Age of Vagrants*

Found in	*7–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*20–9*	*30–9*	*40–9*	*50–9*	*60+*	*Total known*	*Total unknown*
Colchester	3	13	12	8	14	8	5	10	73	164
Crondall 1598–1622	2	3	2	7	7	3	2	0	26	29
Westmorland	1	2	14	27	17	13	13	5	92	19
Total	6	18	28	42	38	24	20	15	191	212

The concentration of vagrants between adolescence and middle age is clearer in the Westmorland than in the Colchester evidence, partly because in the latter exceptional ages such as 90, 75, and 70 seem to have been particularly noted. In Westmorland, on the other hand, those old people who were found wandering the roads were thought not to "deserve to be whipped or stocked" and were given alms rather than punished.[1] Local policies may have varied somewhat. A handful of old, lame, and blind men or women and some young children, one of them a boy of nine "like to perish and die in the streets with cold", are to be found among the Salisbury vagrants. But those apprehended and punished were commonly young able-bodied adults.

They were also single and largely male.

Table 2. *The Status of Vagrants*

Found in	*Single men*	*Single women**	*Husbands and wives†*	*Children‡*	*Total*
Salisbury 1598–1638	343	171	86	51	651
Colchester 1630–64	103	48	32	54	237
Norwich 1630–5	97	31	20	13	161
Kent, Sussex, Surrey 1632–9	208	147	132	127	614
Hertfordshire 1636–9	68	41	12	11	132
Lancashire and Westmorland 1634–8	561	254	80	21	916
Devon and Cornwall 1634–8	166	56	26	48	296
Total	1,546 (51·4%)	748 (24·9%)	388 (12·9%)	325 (10·8%)	3,007 (100·0%)

* Includes wives deserted by or running away from their husbands. † Includes alleged marriages.
‡ Those described as "children" and those under the age of 15 where ages given.

It is clear from Table 2 that at the time of apprehension half the vagrants were single men and a further quarter were single women. Only the figures for the south-east, with high proportions of married couples and children, are exceptional.[2] But even here over half the vagrants were adults who were either unmarried or travelling without their spouse. This evidence on family structure may slightly distort the facts, since a few apparently single vagrants may have had families wandering with them who escaped detection, and children under the statutory age of seven may sometimes not have been recorded although wandering with a parent. An Irishman whipped in Salisbury was later found in War-

[1] P.R.O. SP 16/388/7(xxiv, xxxvii).
[2] The reasons for this difference, which may include regional variations in age at marriage, are unclear. —Cf. below, p. 374.

minster with a wife and children, for example.[1] But the predominance of men among vagrants is evident.[2]

It is also unlikely that the paucity of complete families grossly misrepresents reality. For vagrant liaisons, whether legal or not, were unstable and temporary. There were 17 couples among the Salisbury vagrants described as "living lewdly together, being unmarried"; ten single women were spared punishment because they were pregnant; another 17 were sent back to their husbands, while one man alleged that he "travelleth from place to place to seek his wife who is departed from him, and here he persuaded one Felton's daughter that he would marry her". Their children felt the consequences. The Salisbury justices twice had to send for the mothers of young boys deserted in the town and a Hertfordshire rogue "had left a child of his in a barn and foresaken it".[3] The attitude of authority to alliances of this kind was predictably ambivalent. On the one hand, justices concerned with the growing number of poor tried to discourage their marrying; but as upholders of the institutions of "civil society" they could also find ample excuse for the punishment of vagrants who did not "range themselves into families, but consorted together as beasts".[4]

Yet, however misinterpreted or exaggerated by contemporaries, the characteristics which lay behind this reaction served the important function of distinguishing vagrants from other social groups who might otherwise have been included among them. The vagabond class was in practice a limited one even if its boundaries were roughly defined and based on ready social prejudices. The recognized domestic poor of a town usually comprised the old and young and contained a large proportion of women.[5] If able-bodied unemployed men might be "forced to turn vagrant" by local authorities, it was more difficult to treat these groups in a similar way. Equally there were categories of migrant who did not conform to the characteristics of the vagrant described above, and who might gain some imperfect protection from this fact. For local authorities distinguished between the migrants who could be punished as vagrants and those against whom other settlement regulations must be invoked. In Colchester and Norwich the many "strangers" who were simply ordered to leave the town, sometimes "on pain of punishment as a vagrant" if they returned, or who had to find sureties to "save the town harmless", were included in the same record as vagrants; in Salisbury they were entered in the parish poor accounts. In many cases these strangers were legally distinguishable from vagrants, because they had obtained employment, or recently rented accommodation in the town, or had certificates to travel in search of work.[6] But they were also socially distinct. Of the 100 strangers presented by the parochial authorities in Salisbury between 1629 and

[1] S.C.A. Z225, 19 May 1630; W.R.O. Sessions Roll, Trinity 1630, doc. 135. Sixty-four of the single women and 21 of the single men in Table 2 had children wandering with them.

[2] The predominance was even greater in eighteenth-century France.—O. Hufton, 'Begging, Vagrancy, Vagabondage and the Law', *European Studies Review*, II (1972), 110.

[3] P.R.O. SP 16/329/56.

[4] W.R.O. Sessions Minute Book 1631–6, Mich. 1633; P.R.O. SP 16/193/79; R. Younge, op. cit. ch. XIV, p. 11.

[5] Cf. J. F. Pound, ed. *The Norwich Census of the Poor, 1570* (Norfolk Rec. Soc. XL, 1971), pp. 95–6; Clark and Slack, eds. op. cit. p. 166.

[6] C.B.R. Sessions Book II, April, July 1631, Nov. 1632; Sachse, ed. *Minutes, 1632–5*, pp. 70, 71, 73, 77, 102; S.C.A. S162, fos. 1–2 and *passim*.

1635, for example, 38 were travelling with a spouse and 28 were children; there were only 24 single men and 10 single women among them.

Contemporary definitions of and attitudes towards vagrancy were sufficiently clear-cut, therefore, to restrict the penalties for the offence to only one section of the migrant population. Indeed, those whipped as vagrants did not even include all the most destitute wanderers. Lists of 321 "poor distressed travellers" who were provided with lodging or alms by the constables of Coventry in the 1640's contained no less than 106 children and 60 husbands and wives. Many were cripples, maimed soldiers, or other victims of civil war. But others were poor wanderers of the kind who were given charity rather than a whipping at other periods and in other towns.[1] Only 12 people were described as vagrants in these lists. Those punished as vagabonds were a roughly identifiable sub-group among migrants, shading into other categories of wanderers and paupers, but marked out at the extreme by an absence of complete families and a predominance of single men among them.

III

The most important characteristic of the vagrant was, however, his long-term and often long-distance mobility. Many vagrants knew the roads of England like the backs of their hands. Sometimes they had a regular itinerary. Edward Yovell, for example, a Londoner by birth, began wandering after ending his apprenticeship in Worcester. Twice in two years he took up casual work in London where he had friends, then helped with the harvest at his uncle's in Surrey, next worked at various inns in Chichester, and finally returned to Worcester via Salisbury, Bristol, and Gloucester, presumably for the winter. Other vagrants had a single destination in view. Yovell's companion suggested they might break their circuit through the rich southern counties and go to "Andover and from Andover to Newbury and from Newbury to Oxon and from Oxford directly to York", to pastures new.[2] But in the case of most vagrants we can determine only two points in their journey: their place of punishment and the birth- or dwelling-place to which they were returned. The distance between these two points, measured in a straight line and including any sea or estuary crossings, is clearly only the crudest indicator of distance actually moved. But such a measurement does suggest the geographical horizons of the vagrant class, and since similar information has been used for other sections of the population it can be manipulated for comparative purposes.

Studies of other groups of migrants have suggested that although mobility was common it normally took place within a relatively confined area. Of the witnesses appearing before archdeaconry courts in east Sussex between 1580 and 1640, most had moved from their place of birth, but less than 5 per cent had gone more than 40 miles. Less than 7 per cent of those moving into Sheffield to be apprenticed between 1625 and 1649 and less than 15 per cent of a group of apprentices moving into Salisbury between 1598 and 1640 came more than that distance. Apprentices moving into Southampton in this period and to Birming-

[1] Coventry City Record Office, W1026/7–10. Mr C. V. Phythian-Adams kindly drew my attention to these documents. Similar poor travellers were given lodging in Ipswich.—J. Webb, ed. *Poor Relief in Elizabethan Ipswich* (Suffolk Recs. Soc. IX, 1966), pp. 80–90.

[2] S.C.A. Q136b, 14 Dec. 1601.

ham rather later had similarly come from a restricted area. There were local differences. In particular, inhabitants of the East End of London had often travelled more than 50 miles.[1] But with the exception of London's extensive pull on the whole of lowland and much of highland England, it is probable that the existence of competing urban centres of attraction made most mobility essentially local.

Vagrants, however, had often come much greater distances and moved deliberately from one urban centre to another. Table 3 shows that of 2,651 vagrants whose place of origin can be determined, 50 per cent had travelled more than 40 miles and 22 per cent had gone more than 100 miles.[2] Although the majority had moved less than 50 miles and the median distance was rather less than 45 miles, substantial numbers of vagrants had wider geographical horizons than other mobile groups in the population.

Table 3. *Distances between Places of Origin and Punishment of Vagrants*
(*Number of vagrants expressed as percentage of total*)

Vagrants found in	*Distance to place of origin in miles*								*Total*	
	0–20	*21–40*	*41–60*	*61–80*	*81–100*	*101–50*	*151–200*	*200+*	(%)	(*No.*)
Salisbury	16·5	26·2	14·2	15·6	7·7	11·4	3·9	4·5	100·0	648
Colchester	15·7	14·0	36·0	3·4	2·5	11·9	2·5	14·0	100·0	236
Norwich	52·5	18·1	3·8	4·4	8·8	6·3	3·1	3·1	100·0	160
Kent, Sussex, and Surrey	19·2	20·3	12·6	8·8	5·1	20·3	5·6	8·1	100·0	605
Hertfordshire	10·6	41·2	4·7	22·4	3·5	17·6	0·0	0·0	100·0	85
Lancashire and Westmorland	43·5	30·5	12·3	4·7	3·7	2·6	2·1	0·6	100·0	653
Devon and Cornwall	21·6	10·6	8·3	5·7	5·7	9·5	34·8	3·8	100·0	264
Total (%)	26·2	23·3	13·8	8·8	5·4	11·0	6·6	4·9	100·0	—
(no.)	694	617	365	234	143	292	176	130	—	2,651

There were significant chronological and regional variations, however. It is clear that periods of bad harvest led to an increase in the number of vagrants punished in both Salisbury and Colchester. In each town the annual figure was highest at the beginning of the register, 96 vagrants being whipped in Salisbury in 1598 and 59 in Colchester in 1631, no doubt in part as a consequence of initiative from the central government.[3] But the number of vagrants punished again

[1] J. Cornwall, 'Evidence of Population Mobility in the Seventeenth Century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XL (1967), 150; E. J. Buckatzsch, 'Places of Origin of a Group of Immigrants into Sheffield, 1624–1799', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. II (1950), 305; S.C.A. Tailors' Book EI/245 and Add. 3. apprenticeship indentures, 1612–14; A. J. Willis and A. L. Merson, *A Calendar of Southampton Apprenticeship Registers, 1609–1740* (Southampton Records Series, XII, 1968), p. xxix; R. A. Pelham, 'The Immigrant Population of Birmingham, 1686–1726', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, LXI (1937), 45–64; D. Cressey, 'Occupations, Migration and Literacy in East London, 1580–1640', *Local Population Studies*, V (1970), 57.

[2] In some cases it has proved impossible to trace the village to which a vagrant was whipped. Hence the totals in Table 3 do not entirely correspond with those in the Appendix. Except in the case of counties close to the place of punishment, however, the county town has been taken in doubtful instances. Where there are two possible places of origin with the same name, that nearer to the place of punishment has been used. Where the vagrant is simply described as "Irish", distances have been measured to the nearest point on the Irish coast. Lancashire vagrants described merely as coming from Yorkshire or "the North" have been taken as travelling 21–40 and 41–60 miles respectively, these being the usual distances of movement in similar cases where precise places of origin are also given.

[3] The Salisbury record begins on 20 April 1598, shortly after the Privy Council's order enforcing the

rose significantly, to more than twice the annual average, in Salisbury in 1630 and in Colchester in 1648.[1] Dearth also had a disproportionate effect on particular groups of wanderers. In 1630 and 1631 an influx of Irish vagrants raised the proportion coming more than 200 miles to each town. But there is also some evidence that a run of bad harvests produced an increase in local vagrancy. This was particularly evident in 1598 when 40 per cent of Salisbury vagrants had come less than 20 miles; and in this year only, women outnumbered men among them. Although it is impossible to separate the administrative efficiency of authorities at the beginning of the record, or the readiness of local communities to co-operate in attacking vagabonds when food was short, from the distinctive effects of high grain prices on vagrancy itself, the two were related phenomena.[2]

The number of vagrants apprehended also varied from month to month, the peaks coming generally in March and October.

Table 4. *Months in which Vagrants were Punished*

Place	*J*	*F*	*M*	*A*	*M*	*J*	*J*	*A*	*S*	*O*	*N*	*D*	*Total*
Salisbury:													
1598	—	—	—	36	41	0	1	1	0	5	8	4	96
1599–1638	45	44	77	59	59	32	40	50	26	36	33	54	555
Colchester	18	20	45	19	12	18	14	8	7	42	20	14	237
Norwich	9	23	22	14	9	4	30	6	2	19	10	13	161
Total	72	87	144	128	121	54	85	65	35	102	71	85	1,049

Again local factors and enforcement influenced the figures. In Norwich, for example, the streets were regularly cleared of beggars in February and July before the visit of the assize judges.[3] Fairs like those in Salisbury in January and October, in Norwich in February, and in Colchester in March no doubt attracted additional migrants. The fall in numbers in September may be explained either by the availability of harvest work outside the towns or by official reluctance to enforce the laws at a time when extra migrant labour was needed and tolerated.[4] But the figures support the observation of contemporaries that vagrants began to move in the spring, as grain prices rose towards their peak and the condition of the roads improved.[5]

If the problem of vagrancy varied over time, it also differed from place to place, and it is the geography of English vagrancy which the records illuminate most clearly. Although there are important exceptions, Table 3 suggests that vagrants punished in highland England had moved much shorter distances than most of those found in the lowlands. Three-quarters of the vagabonds taken in Lancashire and Westmorland were recruited within 40 miles of their place of

Vagrancy Act (*Acts of the Privy Council, 1597–8*, pp. 388–9); the Colchester register starts on 18 Oct. 1630, but there were few entries before Jan. 1631 when the Book of Orders was issued.

[1] 1596–7, 1629–30, and 1647–8 were years of high grain prices.—J. Thirsk, ed. *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: IV, 1500–1640* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 820–1.

[2] Cf. A. Vexliard, *Introduction à la Sociologie du Vagabondage* (Paris, 1956), pp. 204–5; J. Meuvret, 'Demographic Crisis in France from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century', in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, eds. *Population in History* (1965), p. 512.

[3] Sachse, ed. *Minutes, 1632–5*, pp. 57, 159.

[4] Cf. R. Steele, *Tudor and Stuart Proclamations* (Oxford, 1910), I, 191 (1630); P.R.O. SP 12/81/25.

[5] Read, ed. op. cit. p. 174; W. J. Paylor, ed. *The Overburian Characters* (Percy Reprints, XIII, 1936), p. 73; P.R.O. SP 16/234/57.

punishment, compared with 40 per cent of those in the south-eastern counties and 30 per cent of those in Colchester. While Irish vagrants account for the high proportion coming more than 150 miles into Devon and Cornwall, it would appear that Scotland did not provide a similar reservoir of poor migrants for at least the western side of the Pennines.

Even more striking, however, is the exceptionally high proportion of Norwich vagrants coming less than 20 miles, more than in any other region. Two-thirds of the total indeed were returned to places in Norfolk itself.[1] This was not due to any obvious lack of attraction of a rich and charitably well-endowed provincial capital for the vagrant class, but to its remoteness from the main lines of vagrant mobility. For the evidence suggests that, excluding movement within a short radius of major centres, the dominant stream of vagrant migration was towards the south-east, and specifically towards London. Given its situation, Norwich could not attract vagrants from long distances moving towards the Home Counties.

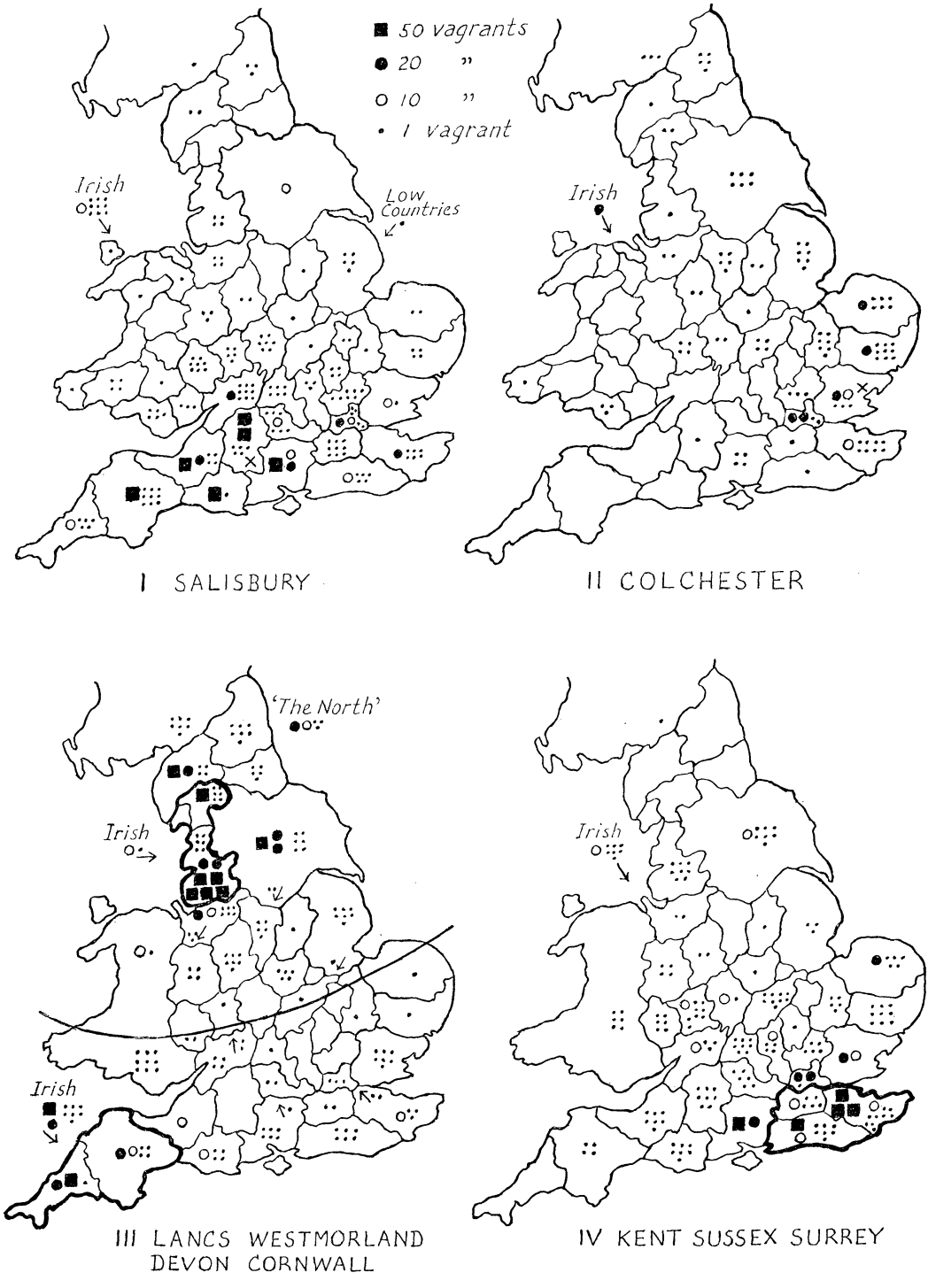
The Appendix shows the counties to which our sample of vagrants was returned and from it we can analyse in general terms the movement of vagrants in various parts of the country. Salisbury's contingent had the widest geographical experience, scarcely a county of England being unrepresented among them. This was partly the product of Salisbury's situation, at the junction of the main highways from London to Exeter and from Bristol to Southampton. As Map I suggests, the majority of vagrants were moving along these axes or on that route through the southern counties on which Harman commented.[2] Many had come from settlements clustered along the three main roads to Exeter via Taunton, Sherborne, and Dorchester, and ease of communication by river and road largely determined the local distribution of vagrant origins. Looking at the overall pattern, however, it appears that rather more of the long-distance migrants were moving from west to east than vice versa, although Salisbury was in a rich-enough area also to attract vagrants from the Home Counties. Taking the counties south of a line from Bristol to London, 199 vagrants came from counties to the west of Wiltshire, 146 from those to the east. The position at Colchester was similar (Map II). Here the main routes were southwards through East Anglia and in both directions along the east coast from Newcastle to London and Kent. In lowland England, therefore, there was both general movement towards London and the Home Counties and a contrary stream away from the south-east.

When we look at vagrants caught in highland regions the picture is at once unambiguous and dramatic (Map III). Movement was towards the lowlands. The origins of 212 of the vagrants found in Devon can be traced. Of these 26 were from Cornwall, as many as 77 from Ireland, and 34 from Devon itself. Only 75, or 35 per cent, came from counties to the east. The pattern in the north-west is even clearer. Of 557 vagrants found in Lancashire whose origins may be discovered, 278 came from within the same county, many of them from parishes north of those in which they were found, or from "beyond the Ribble". Another 146 were from Westmorland, Cumberland, Northumberland, Durham, and

[1] J. F. Pound informs me that there was a similar local recruitment of Norwich vagrants in the later sixteenth century.

[2] Judges, op. cit. p. 84. The Salisbury–London road was a major haunt of vagrants.—Cf. Guilding, ed. op. cit. II, 143–4.

THE ORIGIN OF VAGRANTS BY COUNTY



I SALISBURY

II COLCHESTER

III LANCS WESTMORLAND DEVON CORNWALL

IV KENT SUSSEX SURREY

Yorkshire, and 37 from Scotland, "the Borders" or "the North". Only 96, or 17 per cent, were from counties further south or from Ireland. It is unfortunate that no similarly large sample can be used to examine vagrants caught in the midlands in order to follow these currents further and to see whether, as in 1571–2, there was similar movement from the Welsh highlands into England.[1] But the majority of the few vagrants whose origins were noted by the justices of Nottinghamshire had come from Yorkshire and the north-eastern counties; while only 17 out of 112 vagrants taken in Monmouthshire in the 1630's were sent back to English parishes.[2]

This is not to say that most vagrants were intending to move to London. Many had no such single destination in mind and those who had did not always reach it. Although no full records of the origins of vagrants in the capital itself have yet been discovered, those taken in Hertfordshire in the 1630's may be comparable. They had not come from the extremities of England but from a range of midland and south-eastern counties, the largest long-distance group coming from Shropshire. One has in fact a picture in Ravenstein's terms of vagrant migration by stages, wanderers moving from the midlands towards London being replaced by others moving into the midlands from highland regions.[3] But that London was the magnet whose growth imposed its influence on the pattern of mobility elsewhere appears from the origins of vagrants found in Kent, Sussex, and Surrey (Map IV). Apart from a good deal of local mobility towards and from London, the main streams of long-distance movement were along the south coast and from East Anglia, not from the midland counties on the other side of the capital.

The isolation of places of origin and punishment in the records, and hence in this discussion, tends of course to oversimplify the reality of vagrant movement, by suggesting purposeful linear migration rather than the more untidy irregular and often circular wandering of individual vagrants. Usually it is possible only to speculate about intervening stages in their journeys and their ultimate destinations. However, it seems probable that these records capture vagrants at many different points in their wandering and can illustrate the general directions in which they were moving, though not the regularity and deliberation with which they followed any particular route. With this reservation, it may be noted that the overall pattern of vagrant mobility is consistent with the generalizations suggested by studies of migration elsewhere. The predominant stream of movement is from highland towards lowland areas.[4] This pattern is confirmed and extended by the attraction of a "town of rapid growth" and "a great centre of commerce" in the south-east. "Each main current of migration produces a compensating counter-current" along the same route but in the opposite direction, following personal contacts and communications facilities.[5]

One of Ravenstein's laws, however, only partially fits this evidence, namely

[1] Welsh vagrants in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire in 1571–2 are recorded in P.R.O. SP 12/80/51, 57, 60, 81/14, 44, 46, 83/1, 86/16, 22.

[2] P.R.O. SP 16/329/63, 349/86 (Notts.); SP 16/270/18, 271/92, 293/82, 310/107, 329/26 (Mon.). Cf. Lister, ed. op. cit. II, 17; A. D. Dyer, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1973), p. 183.

[3] E. G. Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, XLVIII (1885), 199.

[4] Cf. E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (Paris, 1966), I, 96–101; J. Nadal and E. Giralt, *La Population Catalane de 1553 à 1717* (Paris, 1960), pp. 181–4.

[5] Ravenstein, loc. cit. 198, 199; E. S. Lee, 'A Theory of Migration', in Jackson, ed. op. cit. pp. 292–3.

that "females appear to predominate among short-journey migrants."[1] Of the adult vagrants travelling less than 40 miles to Salisbury and Colchester, 43 per cent were women, compared with 31 per cent of those coming more than that distance. But the difference is not great and in each case the proportion of women among those coming more than 200 miles was high, 50 per cent in the case of Colchester, nearly 30 per cent in the case of Salisbury, due largely to the numbers of women found among Irish immigrants. Regional differences may be more important than any associated with length of journey. Table 2 would suggest that there were more women to be found among vagrants in the south-east (and to some extent in Hertfordshire) than in south-western or north-western England. But whether this was a result of local authorities discriminating against unemployable women in the south-east or conversely of the attraction of parts of the Home Counties for female labour,[2] or whether it reflected an important highland/lowland distinction in migratory habits or sex ratios, the present evidence will not allow us to say.

In fact the precise "push" and "pull" factors at work in these patterns of migration are elusive. The attraction of towns may be readily appreciated. While their inns and ale-houses provided lodging and rich travellers who might be mulcted, their poor law and charitable institutions, "invited a swarm and surcharge of poor", as Bacon observed.[3] At the same time their suburbs and neighbouring villages were relatively or entirely free from municipal jurisdiction. Crowds of vagrants were found in villages round Hertford and St Albans and in Southwark, St Giles in the Fields, Blackheath, and Stepney around London.[4] But the forces which pushed men on to the roads in the first place are not easy to discern. Personal tragedies, the death of a parent or eviction from a house, or local disasters such as fires were no doubt often responsible though rarely referred to. Epidemics of plague might provoke flight from centres of infection but equally draw an influx of strangers to fill empty houses when the crisis was over.[5] Industrial depression and unemployment may have been a common cause of vagrancy, as the justices of Hertfordshire thought in 1637,[6] but again the sources used here give little direct information. Depression in the textile industries of East Anglia or the west country was at once too widespread and too sporadic for it to be easily associated with any single group of vagrants. Few vagrants are to be found in Colchester from other Essex towns in the 1630's, for example, presumably because it was apparent that employment conditions were no better there, while the movement of men from the clothing towns of the western counties into Salisbury is no more striking in the 1620's than before or after.

A comparison of "woodland" and "champion" country is rather more fruitful. The work of Dr Thirsk and Prof. Everitt has drawn attention to the expand-

[1] E. G. Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', *Jnl. R. Stat. Soc.* LII (1889), 288.

[2] Women may have been extensively employed in hop-picking in Kent.—Cf. C. W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth Century Kent* (1965), p. 94.

[3] Spedding, ed. op. cit. IV, 250–1.

[4] P.R.O. SP 16/354/184, 251/12, 259/28, 268/60, 347/29, 363/33, 382/52, 395/117, 415/95. Cf. A. H. French *et al.* 'The Population of Stepney in the Early Seventeenth Century', *Local Population Studies*, III, (1969), 47.

[5] For complaints of the multitude of vagrants in plague years see W.R.O. Sessions Rolls, Mich. 1603, doc. 209, Hilary 1627, doc. 111.

[6] P.R.O. SP 16/385/43.

ing squatter populations of forest and pastoral areas in this period.[1] One cause of this growth, migration into these regions from more settled arable areas, can sometimes be traced in vagrancy records. In the 1630's, for example, a third of the vagrants found in the Bolton division of Lancashire, on the edge of pastoral moorland, had come up from the mixed farming lowlands around Wigan.[2] But much more conspicuous are the consequences of the growing populations only precariously supported by rural industry in pastoral areas. Vagrants from the Pennine uplands moved on in large numbers into other parts of the same region or into the lowland plain of Lancashire.[3] There was no doubt more mobility, much of it tolerated or ignored, from arable to pastoral areas than vagrancy records suggest, but it was movement in the opposite direction which was more threatening, out of those woodlands and pastures which were "breeders and nurseries" of "thieves, rogues and beggars".[4]

The importance of wood-pasture regions is also evident in the case of vagrants found in towns. Since Colchester lay in the middle of a belt of wood-pasture farming stretching from London to Norwich, a predominance of vagrants from such origins is not surprising. Conversely, Norwich, on the boundary between two farming areas, drew rather more vagrants from the sheep–corn area to the north than the wood–pasture region to the south, as one might expect from the general direction of vagrant movement. In the case of the Salisbury vagrants, however, where local geography might seem to dictate no obvious pattern and where the number of vagrants is large enough to reveal local concentrations, it is clear that the wood–pasture areas were major sources of recruits. Excluding those coming from within five miles of the town, 55 vagrants were sent back to the chalk country to the west, north, and east of the town. But 42 vagrants had come up the Avon from places in or close to the New Forest; and 37 vagrants came from the more distant wood–pasture region in the square formed by Devizes, Bath, Shepton Mallet, and Warminster, most of them from around Frome Selwood, an area well known for its poverty and vulnerability to harvest failure.[5] In both these areas rural industry and the growth of new settlements combined to produce sporadic unemployment, mobility, and perhaps a habit of vagrancy. It is no accident that woodlanders were attacked in language often reserved for vagrants, as "mean people [who] live lawless, nobody to govern them, they care for nobody, having no dependence on anybody".[6]

Still more decisive in the making of a vagrant than an environment of rural industry or woods and pastures, however, was the experience of urban life. The further a vagabond had moved, the more likely he was to have come from an

[1] Thirsk, ed. op. cit. pp. 80, 111, 409–12. The following discussion is based on Dr Thirsk's analysis of farming regions.

[2] P.R.O. SP 16/364/122, 123. The growing textile industries of upland Lancashire are described in N. Lowe, *The Lancashire Textile Industry in the Sixteenth Century* (Chetham Soc. 3rd ser. xx, 1972), especially pp. 82–3.

[3] Into parts of Amounderness for example.—P.R.O. SP 16/383/56, 395/105. Cf. W. G. Howson, 'Plague, Poverty and Population in Parts of North-West England, 1580–1720', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Historical Society*, CXII (1960), 55.

[4] E. R. Foster, ed. *Proceedings in Parliament, 1610* (New Haven, 1966), II, 281.

[5] P.R.O. SP 16/185/40, 204/112. Cf. J. E. Jackson, ed. *The Topographical Collections of John Aubrey* (Devizes, 1862), p. 11; W.R.O. Sessions File, Mich. 1610, doc. 111; G. D. Ramsay, *The Wiltshire Woollen Industry in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1943), p. 72.

[6] Quoted in Thirsk, ed. op. cit. p. 111.

urban setting. If we take as a town any place listed as such by Adams in his *Index Villaris* we can compare the importance of urban communities in the origins of vagrants coming from within the county where they were apprehended and from outside it.[1]

Table 5. *Percentage of Vagrants from Urban Origins*

Found in	*Vagrants from within the county*	*From outside the county*	*All vagrants*
Salisbury (Wilts.)	30·5	50·1	46·9
Colchester (Essex)	30·3	51·7	48·7
Norwich (Norfolk)	24·3	52·8	33·8

Unfortunately similar comparisons cannot be made in the case of those rogues named in the justices' certificates of the 1630's.[2] But from this partial evidence from lowland England, it seems that experience of a town was an important factor in turning a man into a long-distance vagrant.[3] In particular the suburbs of towns, where immigration was an everyday phenomenon, provided the formative background for some vagabonds. The majority of those whipped back from Salisbury to London were from parishes outside the city walls, while three others came from "St. Sidwell's without Eastgate in the suburbs of Exeter".

Whether these vagrants of urban origin were the sons of immigrants or had themselves already made the initial move from country to town it is usually impossible to say. Only in the case of the Salisbury vagabonds can we compare those who gave their place of birth and those who cited their place of dwelling as their settlement.[4] Here at any rate the vagrant whipped back to a town was likely to have merely lived there for some time, while the vagrant who gave a rural parish as his place of origin had usually been born there.

Table 6. *Percentage of Salisbury Vagrants Born in Place of Origin*

	Within Wilts.	*Outside Wilts.*	*All counties*
Urban Origin	54·8	42·3	43·7
Rural Origin	75·4	58·4	62·4
Urban and Rural	69·0	50·0	53·3

It is possible, therefore, that the making of a semi-permanent vagrant may be dimly discerned in the records which survive. A short first move to a local town or an area of rural industry could, after an interval of temporary employment in

[1] J. Adams, *Index Villaris* (1680). This work distinguishes cities and market-towns from villages and parishes.

[2] Too many vagrants were described there as coming merely from a county or country (usually Ireland) to permit valid comparisons. In the case of the three towns in Table 5, those few vagrants whose origins were given imprecisely have been taken as being of rural origin.

[3] Cf. M. Garden, 'L'Attraction de Lyon à la fin de l'Ancien Régime', in *Annales de Démographie Historique*, (1970), 215.

[4] The other sources used here do not regularly differentiate between the two. Even the Salisbury record does not say whether 56 vagrants were born or lived in their place of origin, and these have been excluded from the calculations for Table 6. According to the statute of 1597 vagrants should be sent to their place of birth and only if this was not known to their place of last residence. The statute of 1 James I, c. 7, reversed this for incorrigible rogues, but the later resolutions of the judges imply that the 1597 procedure should be followed.—Barnes, ed. *Somerset Assize Orders*, p. 68. An example of local disputes on this point is: W.R.O. Sessions Roll, Hilary 1636, exam. of the inhabitants of Wootton Bassett.

which settlement rights might be acquired, lead to further movement along the roads of England to other towns, often in the direction of London. And those who had acquired this habit of vagrancy and the social characteristics associated with it brought odium and savage punishment on the heads of some less advanced in the downward vagrancy spiral as well as on themselves.

IV

The records of English vagrancy thus suggest general conclusions about lower-class migration in early modern England, its direction, and its potential consequences. But they refer only to a minority of migrants. Vagrants were not confused with wanderers of all kinds. More informal settlement regulations were utilized to deal with some of these and in urban societies a certain amount of in-mobility was necessarily tolerated to counterbalance the effects of relatively high mortality rates. For every migrant whipped as a vagrant, there must have been several who were accepted into the expanding populations of towns and areas of rural industry. Those who were punished were either unfortunate in being caught or exceptional because sought out by more efficient authorities as particularly unwelcome; and their exceptional characteristics helped to shape and to warrant contemporary definitions of the vagrant.

Nevertheless we must resist the temptation to go to the opposite extreme from the broad interpretation of the vagrant class and describe it in terms of a "sub-" or "counter-culture". The vagrant bands of beggars or gipsies, with a canting language and a structured hierarchy, may sometimes have existed behind our evidence of individual vagabonds. But they were by no means as common as Harman and particularly his later plagiarists suggested. Their descriptions were the result of contemporary desires to define and perhaps to romanticize the vagrant phenomenon, to provide stereotypes in order to make the reality more explicable and more palatable. If not representative of a whole counter-culture, however, many vagrants were clearly exceptions to accepted social norms quite apart from their persistent mobility. Their inability to conform to any stereotype made them all the greater a threat to the prevailing ideology of early Stuart society. They were individuals with few household or kinship ties, and they had often fled from masters, husbands, or wives. These traits were determined or confirmed by experience of a rootless insecure existence in forests or towns or armies, and consolidated by the exigencies of an economy marked by seasonal and chronic underemployment.[1] When we see the special class of migrants who were punished as vagrants we can comprehend contemporary reactions to them as representatives of disorder.[2]

This is not to say that such reactions were justified. The harsh punishments for vagabonds and the increasingly narrow interpretation of settlement regulations helped to make men permanently vagrant. Some of them could still benefit from indiscriminate charity. Two Wiltshire women who had "long wandered the county" were supported "by the alms of good people as they did travel". A

[1] Cf. D. C. Coleman, 'Labour in the English Economy of the Seventeenth Century', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. VIII (1955–6), 280–95.

[2] For the obverse view of beggars as "the only freemen of a commonwealth", see C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), p. 39.

deserted child, being transported from Essex to Kent with a passport in 1594, was taken in by John Brewer who "made it his adopted son, calling him by the name of John Brewer".[1] But many more were whipped and ordered back home, to be disciplined in the local workhouse if they ever arrived. Others spent their lives and died on the road, like a "stripling taken vagrant" found in Essex on his way back from London to Norwich, or were pressed into service as buriers of plague victims or, if in London, as reluctant emigrants to the colonies.[2] In such conditions the family and associated features of respectable society could scarcely survive. The stigma of whip and workhouse was as much a determinant of the special quality of vagrant life as conditions of overpopulation and underemployment. Harman's "Walking Mort" spoke for many of her kind: "God help, how should I live? None will take me into service. But I labour in harvest-time honestly."[3]

Exeter College, Oxford

[1] Cunnington, ed. *Records of Wilts.*, pp. 21–2; E.R.O. D/P 91/1/1, West Tilbury parish register, fo. 1*v*.

[2] E.R.O. D/P 136/1/1, Little Chishall register, 11 Nov. 1604; E.R.O. Q/SBa 2/46, Easter 1642; P.R.O. SP 16/224/65; R. C. Johnson, 'The Transportation of Vagrant Children from London to Virginia, 1618–22', in H. S. Reinmuth, ed. *Early Stuart Studies in Honor of D. G. Willson* (Minneapolis, 1970), pp. 137–51.

[3] Judges, op. cit. p. 100.

APPENDIX

Origins of Vagrants

Returned to	*Salisbury 1598–1638*	*Colchester 1630–64*	*Norwich 1630–5*	*Vagrants apprehended in Kent, Sussex, Surrey 1632–9*	*Lancs. Westm. 1634–8*	*Devon Cornw. 1634–8*	*Herts. 1636–9*	*Total*
Cornwall	15					71		86
Devon	59			4		34		97
Somerset	74			7		10	1	92
Bristol and Gloucestershire	29			13	2	4	1	49
Wiltshire	105	1		8				114
Dorset	51			7		14		72
Hampshire	80	4		70	1	6	1	162
Berkshire	16		1	6		2	1	26
Sussex	15	1		67		6		89
Surrey	9	1		15		2		27
Kent	26	18	2	169	2	13	11	241
London and Middlesex	35	42	10	41		3	1	132
Essex	11	33		30		7	18	99
Suffolk	4	29	7	9		1	4	54
Norfolk	2	26	107	25		1	1	162
Cambridgeshire	1	7	4	5		1	2	20
Hertfordshire	7	3	3	5			1	19
Huntingdonshire	2							2
Bedfordshire	4			1			6	11
Buckinghamshire	3			14			9	26
Oxfordshire	6			8		1	4	19
Northamptonshire	1	4	7	9	1		3	25
Leicestershire and Rutland	1	1		1	5			8
Warwickshire	7	2		11			6	26
Worcestershire	5	4		18	1		1	29
Herefordshire	8			6		2		16
Shropshire	3			4	4		12	23
Staffordshire	2	2	1	2	7			14
Cheshire	4	2	1	2	36	3		48
Derbyshire		5			5			10
Nottinghamshire	1	2		1	1			5
Lincolnshire	5	7	3	3	7	1		26
Lancashire	4	1		8	296			309
Yorkshire	10	6	6	17	96	2		137
Westmorland		2			56			58
Cumberland	2	1			74			77
Durham					5			5
Northumberland	3	5			7			15
"The North"					33			33
Scotland	1	3	3	1	7			15
Wales	17	4		6	11	9	2	49
Ireland	19	20	2	17	11	77		146
Low Countries	1		3					4
Not given	3	1	1	4	248	26	47	330
Total	651	237	161	614	916	296	132	3,007